“CONSTANT DRIPPING WEARS THE STONE”
- the role of microtraumas in the case of the Fibromyalgia syndrome

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Constant strains and stresses in life, whether gradually increasing burdens or sudden unexpected events, cause manifold different stress reactions both physically and emotionally. Heightened stress situations caused in life, can impair a person’s health in every phase of his/her life. This may be in early childhood years, during adolescence, adulthood, or old age. The ability to adapt to stress is developed in childhood, (neuro - humoral processes) so that reactions later in life will follow the same pattern.

If the body’s reaction to stress is pain, it will always react with pain as long as adverse situations present themselves. Eventually constant pain will become the norm. Finally persistent pain develops, as sufficient time was not allowed for effective pain recovery. If it continues in this manner, it will not take long for Fibromyalgia to develop fully.

Whether people are able to cope with burdens in life and smaller or larger traumatic experiences in a healthy way, does not only depend on the pain caused by the event itself, but on the physical and emotional resilience of the individual.

As the nature of the stone decides how quickly the constant dripping wears it away, it is man’s mental or emotional condition that determines resistance or vulnerability towards the adversities in life.

The emotional ability to stay healthy during stress is called “resilience” in medical terms. Resilience describes the capability of mastering adverse crisis situations in life without losing one’s peace of mind.

Meanwhile science has found numerous indications proving that emotional traumatic experiences have a direct influence on the body. Stress, e.g. caused by anger, fear or psychic strain, induces muscular tension in many individuals. In most cases it outlasts the original irritating symptoms.
Above all, psychic pressure - like crises in the realm of interpersonal relationships, the death or loss of a person to whom you relate closely, marriage problems or difficulties with authorities - leads to continual pressure caused by the never-ending load of seemingly minor conflicts. It should be pointed out that the basic conflicts consist of the tension between politeness and honesty or openness. Frictions and conflicts are manifested in the body through motor tension known in common parlance as: “Keep quiet”, “Control yourself”, “Relax”, “Maintain your composure”.

**Fifty Years of Politeness**

An elderly couple celebrated their golden anniversary after long years of marriage. While eating breakfast together, the woman thought: For fifty years I’ve always been considerate of my husband and have always given him the crusty top of the breakfast roll. Today I finally want to enjoy this delicacy for myself. She spread the top part of the roll with butter and gave the other part to her husband. Contrary to her expectations, he was very pleased, kissed her hand and said, “My darling, you’ve just given me the greatest joy of the day. For over fifty years I haven’t eaten the bottom part of the roll, which is the part I like best. I always thought you should have it, because you like it so much.”

*(Nosrat Peseschkian)*
In this sense politeness suppresses one`s own wishes in favour of other people`s benefits. It becomes an instrument to receive attention and acknowledgement without facing the risk of unwanted conflicts or the loss of a valued relationship. This form of unhealthy politeness is frequently derived from imitating parental behaviour. In addition to that, emphasis is laid upon blind obedience and social adjustments to the requirements of typical norms like tidiness, thrift, industriousness, and achievement. The linguistic synonyms are: “Behave yourself properly!”, “What will people think?”, “There is no pleasure without pain.”

A one-sided portrayal of man`s value showing low confidence in one`s strength and little faith in interpersonal relationships may be the reason for the overemphasis on social standards. Instead of hoping and trusting in caring and secure relationships, the persons affected try to avoid the conflicts by summoning up great energy and by adapting themselves, thus apparently securing closeness to their partners. This behaviour often leads to emotional tension of the body in the pattern of “constant dripping wears the stone”.

A patient reported: “Whenever my husband starts swearing I always get a cold shower running down my spine, and my stomach pulls itself together in a knot.” The husband was invited to take part in the therapy. He eventually learned to speak his mind in a manner that did not insult his wife, and the wife learned to change her childlike good behavior in favour of more outspokenness.

“If the roots are deeply buried and unseen beneath the ground, then one does not need to be afraid of the wind blowing.”

In human relationships as well as in business relationships, conflicts will develop not only on the grounds that people have a variety of interests, but frequently because of cultural differences leading to misunderstandings. What is accepted in one culture as polite and appropriate can be impolite and inappropriate in the other person`s tradition. The differences in the norms of the cultures can cause an underlying permanent conflict, which can only be solved by tolerance and getting to know each other`s behaviour patterns. Therefore it can be the purpose of psychotherapy to lead the affected partners to more openness and a mutual getting to know each other with respect.

**About the Crow and the Peacock**

In the palace park, a black crow perched on the branches of an orange tree. Down on the well-tended lawn, a peacock marched around proudly. The crow screeched, “How can one even permit such a strange bird to enter this park? He walks around as arrogantly as if he were the sultan himself. And with those downright ugly feet! And his feathers such a horrible shade of blue! I would never wear a colour like that. He drags his tail around like a fox.” The crow stopped and waited silently for a reply. The peacock did not say anything for a while, but then he began to speak with a melancholy smile, “I don`t think your assertions correspond to reality. The bad things you say about me rest on misunderstandings. You say I´m arrogant, because I hold my head up so that my shoulder feathers stick out and a double chin disfigures my neck. In reality I’m anything but arrogant. I know my ugly features, and I know my feet are wrinkled and look like leather. This actually bothers me so much that I hold my head erect in order not to see my ugly feet. You see only my ugly parts. You close your eyes to my fine points and to my beauty. Haven’t you noticed that? What you call ugly is exactly what people admire in me.”

(Nossrat Peseschkian)
Thus the bodily symptom of pain can have its cause in internal or interpersonal conflicts, and the therapy will be aimed at both a pure physical treatment and a decrease of the emotional tensions. Reducing these symptoms means taking responsibility for one’s own physical and emotional health, and treating each other with mutual respect. The way out of the Fibromyalgia syndrome takes the same path as the way into it. It seems to me that a basic rule is to begin to like your self and your own body and to practice self confidence.

The following attitudes can be helpful:

1. **Pain as a warning sign to be taken seriously**
   - When you notice at your workplace, during housework, that pain is increasing, you should take this signal seriously.
     - Have a break.
     - Change your posture.
     - Work more slowly.
     - Get some help

2. **Getting enough exercise**
   - Those who suffer from constant pain tend to reduce movements to an absolute minimum. In this way the muscles become thinner and weaker and will ache even more. That is why it is important to exercise the whole body sufficiently. Not too much, too fast, or too intensely, but calmly and regularly in one’s own rhythm. Daily walks of ten to twenty minutes, and an exercise programme of your own choice should become routine. Without that your aches and pains will intensify.

3. **Making use of “painskills”**
   - Nothing helps automatically and totally against pain at anytime. But there are many things that one can do to alleviate the pain for a short time, e.g. a warm bath, a massage, an infrared lamp, rubbing on a pain relief cream over the area and applying compresses to it, stretching exercises, grain cushions, and many more. These “painskills” should be made use of as often as they are required.

4. **Positive activities**
   - It is important that the pain does not dominate your entire life and that regardless of the impediment you continue to do positive things: meeting colleagues, friends and family, cultivating your relationships.
Some distraction can be helpful: sitting quietly in the open countryside, playing board or card games, assembling jigsaw puzzles, listening to quiet music, watching TV, reading a book, solving crossword puzzles, colouring in mandalas, playing with your pets, visiting an exhibition in the museum, going to a café, flicking through magazines, looking at photos, watching people, and so on.

5. Prevent stress with the slogan: “Praise loudly-criticize quietly”.

Nervousness and stress make pain worse. Anyone who is constantly annoyed tenses his muscles, and eventually has pain that leads to bad moods and even more annoyance. Those who experience pain must avoid this type of stress.

Therefore: while driving the car, at your workplace, together with your husband/wife, with colleagues at work, in the restaurant: It is better to concede, simply ignore, or probably stand up for your own opinion in a reasonable way, and say no. It is important that both conflicting parties respect each other.

6. Think in a realistic way and remain positive.

Whoever thinks that everything is pointless and the pain will never get better, only makes it worse. Whenever you think that you only need to find the right medicine or the right doctor and everything will be okay, you will be disappointed.

Realistic thinking is better, e.g.:  
- “If I take a rest and have a bath, it can probably alleviate my pain”.
- “If I carry out my therapy regularly, I will recover slowly”.
- “I am valuable just the way I am”.
- “I respect others as well as myself”.
- “Exercise and everything else I can do myself are more important than taking medicine or having injections. Medication is like crutches, it only helps when I do the walking myself”.
- “Severe pain does not mean that the situation is hopeless. It means that I should stop and take a rest, and afterwards continue work more slowly”.
- “If I do something for my well being, it will help me”.
- “If I help others, it will comfort me”.
7. Make room for imagination and spirituality.

- prayer
- meditation
- progressive muscle relaxation training
- relaxation through self hypnosis
- imagination exercises
- breathing techniques
- attentiveness
- yoga
- music.
- painting
- to be quiet in the open countryside

According to the slogan “patience makes a bed of roses”, “impatience leads to neurosis,” I wish you a lot of patience in creating a life of friendship with your own body and with people in whom you trust.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Literature:

- Dr. med. Fischer, Frank, Zug, SGSS: Homepage- Download für Patienten